

**The Life and Miracles
of
St. Benedict**

(by Pope Gregory the Great)

translated by

ALEXIUS HOFFMANN, O.S.B.

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⊕ **ALCUINUS,**
Abbas.

Imprimatur

⊕ **JOSEPHUS F. BUSCH,**
Ep. S. Clodoaldi.

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Preface

The author of what here bears the title "Life and Miracles of St. Benedict" is no less a personage than the illustrious Father of the Church, St. Gregory I, usually called the Great, who was born about 540, was elected Pope in 590 and ruled the Church for fourteen years, to the day of his death in 604. Among his numerous works is one of "Dialogues" in four books, the second of which is devoted entirely to St. Benedict. It was translated into Greek by Pope Zachary (741-752). Both the Latin and the Greek Text may be found in Migne's *Patrologia Latina* vol. 66. The Dialogues were written about 594, to judge from the author's statement (in Book III) that "This tribune also told me that five years ago, when the Tiber overflowed its banks in Rome and rose even above the city walls, flooding most of the regions of the city, the Adige also flooded the city of Verona." This inundation occurred in 589.

The present work is not a biography in the modern sense of the word; there are no dates, few details, we hear little of St. Benedict's infancy, not even the name of his parents; St. Scholastica receives brief mention in a late chapter. It was not the author's purpose to write a biography. Pope Gregory was a serious-minded man, unceasing in his effort to save souls by preaching and teaching.

PREFACE

Then, as now, people listened with greater eagerness to examples than to precepts; and Pope Gregory inculcates his spiritual and ascetical principles by means of copious illustrations. The latter are not inventions; he points out his sources first hand and second hand, and does so with extraordinary care in this particular book.

Some writers affect surprise that so busy a Pontiff condescended to produce such a piece of literature. He himself tells us why he did so, in the prologue to the very first book of Dialogues. 'Being upon a certain day too much overcharged with the troubles of worldly business... I retired myself into a solitary place, very fit for a sad and melancholy disposition, where each discontentment and dislike concerning such secular affairs might plainly show themselves, and all things that usually bring grief, mustered together, might freely be presented before mine eyes. In which place, after that I had sat a long while in much silence and great sorrow of soul, at length Peter, my dear son and deacon, came unto me, a man whom from his younger years, I had always loved most entirely and used him for my companion in the study of Sacred Scripture; who, seeing me drowned in such a depth of sorrow, spoke unto me in this manner:

"What is the matter? or what bad news have you heard? for, certain I am, that some extraordinary sadness doth now afflict your mind?"

To whom I returned this answer: "O Peter, the grief which I continually endure is unto me both old and new; old through common use, and new by daily increasing. For mine unhappy soul wounded with worldly business, doth now call to mind in what state it was when I lived in mine Abbey (on the Coelian Hill), and how then it was superior to all earthly matters, far above all transitory and corruptible pelf, how it did usually think upon nothing but heavenly things; and though it was enclosed in a mortal body, yet did it by contemplation pass far beyond earthly bounds and penetrate to the very height of heaven and as for death, the memory whereof is almost to all men grievous, that it did love and desire as the end of all misery, the reward of its labors and the very entrance to an everlasting and blessed life. But now, by reason of my pastoral charge (as Pope) my poor soul is enforced to endure the burden of secular men's business, and after so excellent and sweet a kind of rest defiled it is with dust of worldly conversation... Sometimes also, my sorrow is increased by remembering the lives of certain notable men who with their whole soul did utterly forsake and abandon this wicked world; whose high perfection when I behold, I cannot also but see mine own infirmities and imperfections; very many of whom did, in a contemplative and retired kind of life, much please God; and lest by dealing with

transitory business they might have decayed in virtue, God's goodness vouchsafed to free them from the troubles and affairs of this wretched world."

"But that which I have now said will be far more plain and better perceived, if the residue of my speech be dialoguewise, distinguished by setting down each of our names, you asking what you shall think convenient, and I by answer giving satisfaction to such questions as you shall demand at my hands."

PETER.—I do not remember any in Italy that have been very famous for virtue; and therefore I am ignorant who they be.... for although I make no doubt but that there have been many good men, yet I do verily think that none of them wrought any miracles, or at least they have been hitherto so buried in silence that, whether any such thing hath been done or no, not any one man can tell.

GREGORY.—If I should, Peter, but report only those things which myself alone have understood by the relation (narrative) of virtuous and credible persons, or else learned by myself concerning the life and miracles of perfect and holy men, I should sooner, in mine opinion, lack day to talk in, than matter to speak of.

PETER.—I am desirous that you would vouchsafe to make me partaker of some of them;

and not to think much, if upon so good an occasion, you interrupt your other study of interpreting the Scripture; because no less edification doth grow by the relating of miracles. For as, by the exposition of that, we learn how virtue is to be found and kept; so by recounting the miracles of holy men, we know how that which is found out and possessed is declared and made manifest to the world. And some there are that be sooner moved to the love of God by virtuous examples than by godly sermons, and oftentimes by the lives of holy fathers the heart doth reap a double commodity (profit) for if, by comparing of his own life with theirs, he findeth himself inflamed with the love of heaven, although before he had haply a good opinion of himself, yet seeing now how far others do excel him, he becometh also more humble, and is brought to have more lowly conceit of his own actions and virtue.

GREGORY.—Such things as venerable and holy men have told me I will now, without any farther delay, make you partaker of, and that, following the example of Sacred Scripture; for sure I am that St. Luke and St. Mark learned that gospel which they wrote, not by sight, but by the relation of others. Yet lest any in reading should have occasion to doubt whether such things as I write be true or no, I will set down by what means and of whom I have learned them; yet in

some of them you have to know that I remember not all the particulars, but only the matter; in other some, both the matter and also the words."**

For the benefit of students of Benedictine history a number of notes have been added, also a chronological arrangement of known data in the life of St. Benedict. Pope Gregory's narrative is the earliest source; tradition offers a number of details, not all of which meet the approval of critical historians. Little as we know of the life of St. Benedict, that which has come down to us is most valuable. From Gregory's narrative we learn where St. Benedict was born, where educated, why he left Rome, where he lived as a hermit; we hear of his external activity in preaching to the people and building monasteries; we learn why he abandoned Subjaco and went to Monte Cassino; how he organized a large community there, and died and was buried there. This is sufficient to ascertain his place in contemporary history. He is an imposing, serene figure, a "man of God," a loving father, patient and prudent in the government of his monks.

All subsequent biographies of St. Benedict have been drawn from the II. Book of Dialogues. The four books of Dialogues have recently been re-printed in an English translation, which bears the title:

*From the version of 1608.

The Dialogues of St. Gregory, surnamed the Great: Pope of Rome and the first of that name, translated into our English Tongue by P. W. and printed at Paris in mdeviii.—Re-edited with an introduction and notes by Edmund G. Gardner.—Philip Lee Warner, Publisher to the Medici Society, Ltd., London. Boston, Mass. dcclv Boylston St. (1911).

Other works, outside of Encyclopedias and collections of lives of Saints (such as Butler's), treating of the life of St. Benedict accessible to American readers are the following:

Herwegen, Ildephons, O.S.B., abbot of Maria-Loach: St. Benedict, a character study, transl. (from the German original) by Dom Peter Nugent, O.S.B. London; Sands, 1924.

Lechner, Peter, O.S.B. The Life and Times of St. Benedict, Patriarch of the Monks of the West, London; Burns & Oates, 1900 (an abridgment of Lechner's German original.)

Luck, Edmund, O.S.B. The Life and Miracles of St. Benedict by St. Gregory the Great from an old English version by P. W. (Paris 1608) accompanied by photographs from the works of Andrea Vaccari. London: Washbourne, 1880.

" (A smaller edition of the same text without illustrations. In the preface Dom Luck observes, in a footnote, that the same version had been edited by H. J. Coleridge, S. J. in its entirety and appears as vol. IX of the Quarterly Series published by Burns & Oates.)

McMahon, Aurelius, O.S.B. (of St. Vincent Archabbey. Beatty, Pa.) The life of St. Benedict.—(translated

PREFACE

- from St. Gregory's II Book of Dialogues) Baltimore; John Murphy, 1880.
- Brandes, Karl, O.S.B. Leben des hl. Vaters Benedikt. Einsiedeln und New York; Benziger, 1858.
- Herwegen, Ildephons, O.S.B. Der hl. Benedikt: Ein Characterbild, Duesseldorf, 1919.
- Sauter, Benedict, O.S.B. Der hl. Vater Benediktus nach St. Gregor dem Grossen (text and comment). Freiburg: Herder 1904.
- Tosti, Luigi, O.S.B. St. Benedict: an Historical Discourse on his life, translated (from the Italian original) by William Romuald Canon Woods, O.S.B., London. Kegan Paul, Trench, Truebner & Co., 1896.
- L'Huillier, A., O.S.B. Le Patriarche S. Benoit.—Paris: Retaux, 1905 (with supplementary essays on SS. Placidus and Maurus, and the relics of St. Benedict.)

The present translation claims no particular merit; it has been the translator's purpose to present a version faithful to the original yet couched in language more readily understood. May the perusal of this work and those above indicated result in an increase not only of admiration but also of veneration for the great Patriarch of the Monks of the West.

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St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, Minn.
Sept. 20, 1925.

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The Life and Miracles of St. Benedict

PROLOGUE

SOME years ago there was a man, Benedict, blessed of God by grace and name, who led a very virtuous life and from his childhood had the heart of a man far advanced in age. More mature in character than in years, he gave no thought to pleasure; while he still abode on earth and was free to enjoy temporal blessings, he spurned the joys and attractions of the world. He was born of distinguished parents in the district of Nursia and received a liberal education at Rome. But when he perceived that many of the students were rushing headlong into ruin, he withdrew his foot which he had set, as it were, upon the threshold of the world, lest, if he attained a full knowledge of it, he too might plunge into the abyss. Therefore, he discontinued the pursuit of letters and turning his back upon his home and his father's wealth, he resolved to become a religious, being desirous to please God alone. Accordingly, he left Rome, deliberately abandoning the pursuit of human knowledge and preferring heavenly wisdom.

I have not been able to learn all that he did, but the few things that I am about to relate, I have from four of his own disciples, from Constantine, a very venerable man, who succeeded

him in the government of the monastery; Valentinian, who for many years presided over the monastery at the Lateran; Simplicius, who was his second successor, and finally, Honoratus, who is still the abbot of the monastery in which Benedict first lived.

CHAPTER I.

HOW A BROKEN SIEVE WAS MADE WHOLE.

NOW, when he was abandoning the pursuit of learning and wending his way towards the wilderness, he was accompanied by his nurse, who was tenderly attached to him. When they had come to a place called Enfide and sojourned with certain devout men who dwelt near the church of St. Peter and, of their charity, begged the wayfarers to partake of their hospitality, it came to pass that the aforesaid nurse borrowed from some women in the neighborhood a sieve for the purpose of cleansing grain. She thoughtlessly left the sieve lying on a table, and it accidentally fell to the floor and was broken into two pieces. When upon re-entering the house, she found the broken sieve, she began to weep bitter tears, for she had only borrowed it for use. But the pious and religious youth Benedict, when he saw his nurse in tears, had pity upon her, carried away the pieces of the broken sieve and betook himself to prayer.

When he rose from prayer, he found the sieve whole, so that not a trace of the fracture was visible. Whereupon tenderly consoling his nurse, he gave back to her the sieve that had been broken and was whole again.

This wonderful deed came to the knowledge of all the people round about and was deemed so marvellous that the inhabitants of the place suspended this self-same sieve at the entrance of the church in order that men of that time and in future ages might be reminded how great was the grace of Benedict at the very outset on the way of perfection. The sieve remained there for many years, even down to these very days when the Lombards are overrunning this country.

But Benedict desiring much rather to suffer the evils of this life than to be praised and honored by men, and to toil for God rather than to be made much of by the world, secretly fled from his nurse and went to a retired locality called Sublacus. This place, about forty miles from Rome, is the source of cold, clear waters, which here form a lake whence issues the river Anio.

While he was on his way to this place on his flight, he met a monk named Romanus, who asked whither he was going. When he had heard what Benedict's intentions were, he promised secrecy, gave him aid, supplied him with a religious habit and served him as far as lay in his

power. The man of God, Benedict, having reached his destination, took up his abode in a small cave and for three years remained concealed there unknown to all men but Romanus who lived in a monastery in the vicinity under the direction of the Abbot Adeodatus.

This monk, with charitable intent and without his abbot's knowledge, went forth at certain hours and supplied Benedict with bread that he saved from his own portion. Now, there was no path leading from his monastery down to the cave, since a high cliff rose above the latter; but Romanus was wont to let down, from the top of the cliff, a loaf tied to the end of a long cord, to which he also fastened a little bell in order that upon hearing its sound, the man of God might know when Romanus was sending him food, and might come out and take it. But the ancient enemy of mankind, envying the one for his charity the other for his food, when on a certain day he saw the bread let down from the cliff, threw a stone and broke the bell. Romanus nevertheless continued to supply Benedict with bread in such manner as he could.

But when Almighty God wished Romanus to desist from his charitable efforts, and to show forth the life of His servant Benedict as a pattern for men, that, being set as a light upon a candlestick he might shine unto all that dwell in the

house of God, He deigned to appear in a vision to a certain priest living in a distant place, who was preparing a meal for himself on Easter Sunday. To him the Lord said in the vision:

"You are preparing dainty food for yourself while my servant in that lonely place suffers from hunger."

The priest at once arose and that very Easter day hastened to the place with the food which he prepared for himself, and searched for the servant of God in the mountains, in the valleys and among the rocks, and finally found him hidden in his cave. After they both had prayed, and sat together for a while praising the Lord Almighty, and had held delightful conversation touching matters of the spiritual life, the priest said:

"Rise, let us take food, for today is a great feast."

To whom Benedict replied:

"I know it is a great feast, since I have been favored with your visit."

For Benedict had so completely cut himself off from all men, that he did not know it was Easter day. But the venerable priest assured him saying:

"Truly this is Easter Sunday, the feast of the resurrection of the Lord: it is not fitting that you should abstain from food on this day. I have been sent by Almighty God for this very purpose,

that we may partake of food together."

And so blessing the Lord they partook of the food. At the end of the meal, the priest withdrew.

About this time, too, certain herdsmen discovered Benedict hiding in his cave. When first they saw him in the shrubbery clad in skins, they thought it was a wild beast. But when they recognized what he was, many of them were converted to a godly life by the servant of God. In consequence, his fame was spread in the places round about, and it came to pass that from that time forward he began to receive visits from a great number, who, while they offered him food for his body, received in return from his lips the food of life.

CHAPTER 2.

HOW HE OVERCAME A TEMPTATION OF THE FLESH.

ONE day while he was alone, the tempter approached him in the guise of a small blackbird which began to flutter about his head and boldly to make for his face. It came so close that, if he had wished, he might have caught it with his hand. But he made only the sign of the Cross and the bird left off annoying him. After the bird had flown away, however, he was beset by so

violent a temptation of the flesh as he had never before felt. For he had once upon a time seen a certain woman and now the evil spirit pictured her to his fancy; the memory wrought so powerfully upon his mind that he could scarcely bear the fire of lust burning within him and he was on the point of yielding to a temptation to leave his wilderness. Then, suddenly mindful of the grace that was within him, he returned unto himself, and seeing a thorny shrub close at hand, he cast off his garment, threw himself into the brambles and rolled about in them till every part of his body was suffering torture.

Thus by the wounds which afflicted his body the wound of his soul was healed, since he punished pleasure with pain, and while his exterior was burning from the sting of the thorns, his internal flame was put out. Hence he overcame sin by replacing one kind of fire by another. From that time, so he afterward assured his disciples, he no longer felt temptations of the flesh, so completely had he triumphed over lust. After this, many began to leave the world and hasten to receive instruction from him. Being now beyond the danger of yielding to temptation, he had become a worthy teacher of all virtues. For this reason Moses says in Exodus* that from their twenty-fifth

* The passage is not in Exodus, but in Numbers 8. 24—26.

year and upward the Levites should serve in the sanctuary but after their fiftieth year of age they should be appointed keepers of the sacred vessels.

PETER

I now understand the passage to which you refer in Exodus; still I would ask you to explain it more fully.

GREGORY

It is a well known fact, Peter, that temptations of the flesh are violent in youth, but after the fiftieth year the heat of the body decreases. The vessels are the souls of the faithful. Therefore the chosen ones of God, while they are still subject to temptations, must obey and serve, and weary the body with labor and exertion. But when the mind has become more calm and the heat of temptation has been lessened, they are made keepers of the vessels, since they are now made teachers of souls.

PETER

What you have said, pleases me indeed. And now since you have made this passage clear to me, I would ask you to continue relating what you have begun to say about this holy man.

CHAPTER 3.

HOW A GLASS VESSEL WAS BROKEN BY THE SIGN OF THE CROSS.

GREGORY

(**A**FTER this temptation had passed, the man of God, even like an acre cleared of shrubbery for cultivation, began to yield plentiful fruit from the virtues that he had sown. The fame of his holy life was soon spread far and wide.)

Not far from Sublacus there was a monastery the abbot of which had recently died. Now the whole community came to venerable Benedict, earnestly entreating him to be their abbot. For a long time he was reluctant to consent and he foretold them that his ways and theirs would not agree; but in the end, he was moved by their prayers and gave his consent.

While he was intent upon keeping good order in that monastery and would suffer no one to depart from the line of correct conduct either to the right or to the left by unlawful actions, these monks, whom he had undertaken to guide, fell to raving against him, and reproached themselves for having invited him to be their abbot; their crooked paths would in no manner agree with the straight road that he pointed out for them. Now, when they were aware that they were no longer

allowed to do as they chose and that they must abandon evil practices to which they had grown accustomed, (since it is hard to change minds that have grown old in wicked ways) some of these brethren, since the life of the virtuous is a standing rebuke to the bad, conspired to remove him, for which purpose they mixed poison with his wine.

But when the glass vessel that contained the deadly drink was, as usual, presented to the abbot at table for his blessing, Benedict raised his hand, made the sign of the cross, and the vessel which was held aloft by one of the brethren at some distance from him was broken into pieces at the very moment when the sign was made and it was broken as if a stone had been hurled against it. The man of God at once perceived that the vessel had contained a draught of death, since it bore not the sign of life. Rising from his seat that very moment he called the brethren about him and with a serene countenance and calm mind addressed them, saying:

"May God the Almighty have mercy on you, brethren; wherefore did you mean to do this to me? Did I not tell you in the beginning that your ways and mine would not agree? Go, then, and seek for an abbot who will suit your views, for I shall be your abbot no longer."

Thereupon he returned to his beloved solitude and dwelt alone with himself under the eyes of the Heavenly Father.

PETER

I do not quite fully understand what you mean by saying that he "dwelt with himself."

GREGORY

If the holy man had wished to continue ruling these men against their will for a long time, particularly after they had all plotted against him, he would have perhaps exerted himself beyond his strength, lost his peace of mind and turned the eye of his soul away from contemplation. And while he would daily have spent his efforts in striving to mend their wicked ways, unmindful of his own spiritual condition, he would perhaps have lost himself without finding them. For, whenever we are carried by the current of our thoughts, outside of ourselves, we are *with* ourselves and *not* with ourselves, since, having lost sight of ourselves we are straying elsewhere. Shall we say that he was with himself, that went into a far country, wasted his share of his inheritance, became a servant to a man in that country and fed his swine? who would gladly have eaten the husks he saw them feed upon, and of whom it is written, after he had called to mind the good

things he had lost: "Returning to himself he said: How many hired servants in my father's house abound with bread?" (Luke 15.) If he had previously been *with himself*, how could he have returned *to himself*? I would, therefore say, that the venerable man dwelt with himself, because, at all times keeping close watch over himself, conscious that the eyes of his Creator were always upon him, ever examining himself, he did not permit the eye of his spirit to stray away from himself.

PETER

Why, then, is it written of the apostle Peter, when the angel had delivered him from the prison that he said, coming to himself: "Now I know in very deed that the Lord hath sent his angel and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews?" (Acts 12. 11.)

GREGORY

We are carried outside of ourselves in two ways, Peter: we either fall *beneath* ourselves, when our thoughts dwell upon unworthy things, or we are raised *above* ourselves by the grace of contemplation. That poor wight who fed the swine had fallen beneath himself since he suffered his mind to go astray and wallowed in sin. He, however, whom the angel set free and threw into rapture

was led indeed outside himself, but *above* himself. Both, therefore, returned *to themselves*: the former when he repented of his fault, the latter when he descended from the heights of contemplation to the thoughts of everyday life. Accordingly, I say that venerable Benedict dwelt in the solitude with himself, because he kept strict guard over his thoughts. Whenever the fervor of contemplation carried his thoughts heavenward, he no doubt left himself far below.

PETER

I am delighted with what you say, but I would ask, was it right to leave those brethren whom he had undertaken to rule?

GREGORY

In my opinion, one ought to put up patiently with bad men as long as there are any good men about, who might be benefited by one's efforts: for where we cannot expect any fruit from good men, our endeavors to correct the wicked are sometimes useless especially if there be not far distant a more promising field of labor. For whose sake was the holy man to remain, when he saw that they were all, to a man, bent upon having him out of the way? I must not omit to mention that often perfect men, if they judge that their labor in a certain place is fruitless, will go to some

other place where they may labor with fruit. For this reason, too, that illustrious preacher of the Gospel who yearned to be dissolved and to be with Christ, to whom Christ was life and death a gain, who not only desired to suffer, but also encouraged others to seek suffering, that illustrious man Paul, having been persecuted at Damascus, sought for a rope and a basket that he might be let down from the wall and thus escape from the city. Shall we say St. Paul feared death? Do we not know from his own words that he longed to die for the love of Christ? But when he saw that despite his toil he would reap but little fruit if he remained, he saved his strength to labor with fruit elsewhere. The valiant champion of Christ would not remain in the camp, he hastened to the battle-field. Hence you will understand, if you consider well, that blessed Benedict did not abandon as many whom it was labor lost to teach as he elsewhere restored to spiritual life.

PETER

I am convinced it is as you say, and the instance from the holy Scripture fully confirms your words. But now I would ask you to resume the thread of your narrative.

GREGORY

While this holy man was daily growing in virtue and became widely known for his miracles,

a great number of men came and joined him in the service of God, so that with the help of the Almighty Lord Jesus Christ he was soon in a position to establish at that place twelve monasteries, in each of which he placed twelve monks under an abbot; a few monks, however, he kept with himself, deeming it expedient to teach them in person. About that time several noble and pious men from Rome also came to visit him in the solitude, and intrusted their sons to him and to Almighty God for the purpose of receiving a religious education. Thus Equitius brought his promising son Maurus, and the noble Tertullus his son Placidus: of these the youth Maurus, who was already fairly advanced in virtue, was made Benedict's assistant, while Placidus was as yet a mere child.

CHAPTER 4.

CORRECTION OF AN UNSTEADY MONK.

NOW in one of the monasteries that he had established in the vicinity there was a certain monk who could not stay for prayers, but as soon as the brethren betook themselves to mental prayer, would go out of doors and seek distraction in temporal occupations. When he had been repeatedly admonished by his superior, he was led before the man of God, who in his turn also stern-

ly reproved him. He went back to his monastery and bore the admonition of the man of God in mind for one or two days. On the third day, however, he fell back into his disorderly habit and began to stay away when it was time for mental prayer. When this was reported to the servant of God by the abbot of that monastery, he said:

“I shall come and personally reprimand him.”

And when the man of God came to the monastery and the brethren after chanting the Psalms betook themselves to mental prayer, he saw how a little black boy drew the brother, who could not abide in prayer, out of the oratory by the hem of his garment. Then, Benedict said secretly to Pompeianus, the abbot of that monastery and to Maurus, his attendant;

“Do you not see who is dragging that monk out of the oratory?”

They answered, “No” and he said to them:

“Let us pray that you may also see whom that monk is following.” After they had prayed for two days, the monk Maurus saw the boy, but the abbot Pompeianus did not. On another day, the man of God, coming out of the oratory at the end of the prayer found the monk standing outside and struck him with a rod for the blindness of his heart. From that day the monk was no more worried by the little black boy, but remained steadfastly at prayer to the end, and thus the ancient

enemy no longer dared to meddle with the thoughts of this brother as if he himself had received the blow.

CHAPTER 5.

HOW HE DREW WATER FROM A ROCK.

THREE of the monasteries that he had built in the neighborhood of his hermitage stood upon the bare rocky heights. It was difficult for the brethren to come down from the hill to fetch water for their daily needs, particularly since the slope was steep and the brethren considered the descent perilous. Therefore a deputation of brethren from these monasteries appeared before Benedict and said:

"It is too hard for us to go down to the lake every day and fetch water up to our monasteries; the latter ought to be built elsewhere so that we may have water with less difficulty."

He consoled them with gentle words and sent them away. In the night that followed, he and the child Placidus, of whom I have above made mention, went up to the top of that mountain and spent a long time in prayer, at the end of which he set up three stones to mark the spot and then, without the knowledge of any of those brethren, returned to his own monastery. When the

brethren several days later came to repeat the complaint he said to them:

"Go and dig a little beneath three stones that you shall find piled one upon the other, for Almighty God has power to supply you with water even on the summit of the mountain and relieve you of the burdensome task of going far for it."

They went back and found water already oozing from the rock at the place which Benedict had described. And when they had hollowed out the soil a little, the pit was soon filled with water, which issued in abundance and continues to flow down the side of the rock to the bottom of the ravine.

CHAPTER 6.

HOW AN IRON IMPLEMENT WAS RECOVERED FROM THE WATER.

ON A certain day a simple-minded Goth came to lead a religious life and was gladly received by the man of God. One day Benedict ordered him to be given an iron implement, a heavy knife somewhat curved like a sickle, with which he was to clear a place for a garden. Now, the place which the Goth was to clear of shrubs lay above the shore of the lake. While he was dealing vigorous blows at the shrubs, the knife slipped from the handle and fell into the lake at a point where the

water was so deep that it seemed impossible ever to recover the implement. Thus having lost his implement, the Goth ran trembling to the monk Maurus, told him of his mishap and how much he regretted his fault. Maurus caused the servant of God to be informed at once. Benedict, hearing what had happened, repaired to the shore of the lake, took the handle out of the hand of the Goth and thrust it down into the water. Immediately the iron blade rose from the bottom and slipped back into its place on the handle. He then returned the implement to the Goth saying:

"Here you have your knife: go back to work and be not sad."

CHAPTER 7.

How MAURUS WALKED UPON THE WATERS.

ON A certain day while the venerable Benedict was in his cell, the child Placidus, who was a monk under the direction of the man of God, went out to fetch water from the lake. As he did not let down the vessel with sufficient caution, he lost his balance and fell into the water. The current at once seized him and bore him into the middle of the stream. The man of God who was in his cell was at once aware what had happened and called for Maurus saying:

"Brother Maurus, the child that went out to fetch water has fallen into the stream and the current is carrying him away swiftly."

Then happened a very remarkable thing, unheard of since the day of the Apostle Peter. Having asked and received the abbot's blessing, Maurus instantly hurried down to the lake and, thinking he was still on solid ground, ran out to the spot to which the current had borne the child and seizing him by the hair, ran back towards shore. Then, coming to himself again, when he once more stood upon the shore, he looked back and became aware that he had been running on the surface of the water. He trembled for astonishment for never would he have dared to think of doing such a marvellous thing. Returning to the abbot he told him what had happened. The venerable Benedict attributed the wonderful rescue not to his own merits, but to the obedience of his assistant. Maurus, however, contended that the miracle was due to Benedict's command, and that he could have no share in the merit because he was not conscious of what he was doing. But while these two humble men were debating whose was the merit for this deed, the child who had been rescued from drowning came up and said:

"When I was being drawn out of the water, I saw the abbot's robe above me and thought it was he that had saved me."

PETER

Wonderful and edifying indeed is what you have related. The more I hear of this man's miracles, the more I am anxious to hear.

CHAPTER 8.

OF THE POISONED LOAF CARRIED OFF BY A RAVEN.

NOW when the knowledge and love of our Lord Jesus Christ had spread throughout the locality and many had abandoned worldly lives, bending their necks to the sweet yoke of the Redeemer, the spirit of envy, which cannot bear to see in others the virtue it has not itself, entered into the heart of the priest of a neighboring church, Florentius by name, the grandfather of our sub-deacon of the same name. Urged on by the malice of the ancient enemy of our race, he began to be envious of the holy man's virtues and to belittle the holiness of his life, at the same time persuading men not to visit Benedict.

But when he perceived that he could in no way hinder his success and that the fame of his sanctity continued to spread, so that many felt called to amend their lives when they heard accounts of his holy life, the fire of envy burning within this priest made him even worse. He was indeed desirous of being as popular as Benedict, but was not disposed to live so as to deserve it. The blind-

ness of his jealousy led him to such lengths, that one day he sent the servant of God a poisoned loaf in token, as it were, of Christian communion. The man of God accepted the loaf with thanks, without being aware of the danger that lurked within the bread. At meal time a raven from a neighboring wood was wont to come into the refectory and receive a morsel of bread from the man of God. When the raven came as usual, Benedict cast the loaf the priest had sent him before the bird and commanded it saying:

"In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ take this bread and carry it away to some place where no one may find it."

Whereupon the raven, its beak wide open and wings stretched out began to run about the bread and to croak, as if plainly saying that it was willing to obey and yet could not do what had been ordered. Then the man of God again bade the bird saying:,

"Take it up, be not afraid, and carry it where it cannot be found."

After hesitating for some time, the bird at last picked up the loaf and flew away. About three hours later it returned, having cast away the loaf, and received its usual allowance of food from the man of God. But the venerable abbot, seeing how the soul of the priest was inflamed against him, grieved for him rather than for himself.

Now, the aforesaid priest Florentius, perceiving that he could not kill the body of the servant of God, fell to designing how he might destroy the souls of the disciples. For this purpose he sent seven shameless maidens to play and dance in a garden near the monastery in order that the souls of the monks might be filled with impure desires. When the man of God saw them from his cell, he began to fear that the younger of his monks might fall victims to the temptation. Surmising, however, that this wicked thing had been done in order to annoy him, he yielded to the priest's jealousy. He made provision, accordingly, for all the monasteries he had established by appointing priors, each of whom was to govern a certain number of brethren, and taking with him a few monks left to take up his abode in another place.

Scarcely had the man of God, whose humility induced him to escape from the odious persecution of that priest, set out for his new abode, when the latter was terribly punished by Almighty God. For when he was informed that Benedict had gone away, he was filled with joy. At this very time he was standing under a covered porch, which suddenly fell down and killed him. A certain disciple of the man of God, Maurus by name, took it upon himself at once to bear the news to the venerable abbot Benedict, who was as yet

scarcely ten miles away from that place. saying:

"Return now, Father, for the priest that persecuted you is dead."

Hearing this the man of God Benedict began to lament exceedingly both because his enemy had come to such a bad end and because his disciple rejoiced at the death of the unfortunate man. For this reason he imposed a penance upon the disciple for having presumed to express satisfaction in reporting death of an enemy.

PETER

These are wonderful, astounding things that you relate. In the water drawn from the rock, I recognize Moses; in the recovery of the iron implement, Eliseus; in the walking on the waters, the Apostle Peter; in the obedience of the raven, Elias; in the grief for the death of his enemy, I recognize David. In my opinion. that man was filled with the spirit of all the just.)

GREGORY

Peter, that man was filled with the spirit of the one God, who by the graces of the Redemption mercifully bestowed upon man has filled the hearts of all the elect as St. John (I. 9) says, "That was the true light which enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world," and again (I. 16.) "And of his fulness we all have received." Holy men might, indeed, receive from God the power

of working miracles, but could not bestow that power upon his servants. He that promised to give His enemies no sign but that of the prophet Jonas deigned to die before the eyes of the proud and to rise again before those of the lowly in order that the former might see what they had spurned and the latter what they might love. By this mystery it was brought about that while the haughty saw the ignominy of death, the lowly received power to triumph over death.

PETER

Now that you have told me this, I would ask, to what place he directed his steps and what miracles did he perform there.

GREGORY

When the holy man changed his abode, he did not change his enemy; for he had to fight battles more severe than ever, since he now discovered that the master of wickedness was attacking him openly. The fortified town of Casinum is situated at the foot of a high mountain, the flanks of which partly surround it and which rises about three thousand feet into the air. Here stood a very old temple in which according to the custom of the ancient pagans the peasants living in the surrounding country worshipped the god Apollo. In the neighborhood were also some groves in which demons were worshipped and

where, even at that time, the senseless rustics were wont to offer their impious sacrifices.

When the man of God arrived there, he broke the idol, threw down the altar and cut down the trees in the groves. The temple of Apollo he converted into an oratory in honor of blessed Martin and where the altar of the false deity had stood, he built an oratory in honor of St. John the Baptist. At the same time he instructed a great number of the people living round about and converted them to the true faith. The ancient enemy could not rest when he saw how successful Benedict was in his labors. He now appeared before the holy man no longer invisibly or in a dream, but before his very eyes, raised a great cry and complained that he was suffering violence. So loud were his clamors that even the brethren heard him although they did not see his shape. The venerable abbot subsequently told his disciples that the demon appeared before his bodily eyes in a repulsive form and that flames seemed to issue from his mouth and eyes. But all the brethren heard what the demon said. First he called Benedict by name, and when the latter failed to answer at once, he fell to reviling the holy man. For after he had called "Benedict, Benedict!" without receiving an answer, he cried out: "Maledict!" (that is accursed) not "Benedict—what hast thou to do with me? why dost thou persecute me"?

But we shall now witness new struggles between the ancient enemy and the servant of God. Of his own choice the demon made war upon Benedict, but against his own will furnished him with opportunities for gaining victories.

CHAPTER 9.

HOW A GREAT STONE WAS RAISED BY THE PRAYERS OF THE SAINT.

WHILE on a certain day the brethren were at work building the monastery, before them lay a great stone that they intended to use for the walls. At first, two or three endeavored to raise it but the stone was as immovable as if it were rooted in the ground: plainly, the evil one was sitting upon it and his weight made it impossible even for such a number to move the stone. In their embarrassment the brethren sent word to the man of God, entreating him to come and drive away the demon with his prayer, so that they might be able to raise the stone. He came at once, said a prayer, pronounced a blessing, and the stone was raised with such ease as if it had no weight whatsoever.

CHAPTER 10.

OF THE KITCHEN APPARENTLY AFIRE.

THE man of God saw fit to have the ground dug deeper on the very spot while he was

there. When the brethren had gone down some distance in digging they came upon a brazen idol which was, for the time being, thrown into the kitchen. Suddenly a flame was seen bursting from the kitchen within sight of all the brethren and the building seemed to be doomed to destruction. While the brethren were rather noisily trying to put out the fire, the man of God, attracted by the tumult, made his appearance. Perceiving that the fire was only in the eyes of the brethren and not in his own, he bent down his head in prayer, called away those brethren whose eyes were deceived by the apparent fire and told them to sign their eyes with the sign of the Cross. Then they saw at once that the kitchen building still was whole and sound, and no longer beheld the flames that the ancient enemy had devised in order to deceive them.

CHAPTER II.

OF A CHILD CRUSHED BY A WALL AND AGAIN RESTORED TO LIFE.

AT another time when some of the brethren were building a wall a little higher, since it was necessary to do so, the holy man was meditating in the privacy of his cell. The demon approached him with a sneer and told him to go out

to the brethren who were at work. The man of God at once informed the brethren by a messenger of what had happened and said:

“Be on your guard, brethren, for the wicked spirit will be among you this very hour.”

Scarcely had the messenger spoken these words, when the demon threw down the wall which the brethren were building. In its fall it crushed a young monk, the son of a public official. Subdued and pained, not by the damage to the wall, but by the accident that had happened to the boy, they hurried to Benedict and with tears told him what had happened. The holy abbot ordered the mangled body of the child to be brought unto him. The remains could only be carried wrapped up in a cloth, for the falling wall had not only bruised his limbs but crushed his bones.

The holy man directly ordered the body to be laid down upon the mat in his cell—the same upon which he was accustomed to kneel in prayer; then dismissing the brethren, he closed the door and prayed with even greater fervor than usual. Strange to say, within that very hour he sent the boy back to work whole and strong as ever, and he, by whose destruction the demon fancied he had gained a victory over Benedict, helped the brethren finish the wall.

CHAPTER 12.

OF THE MONKS THAT ATE OUTSIDE THE MONASTERY.

MEANWHILE the man of God began to grow famous for the gift of prophecy: he foretold future events and was aware of things that were done where he was not present. In his monastery it was the practice of the brethren who went to despatch business not to partake of food or drink as long as they were abroad. Now, while this was scrupulously observed as a rule, several brethren were one day sent out upon some business of the monastery and found themselves compelled to remain outside till a late hour. They knew a very religious woman living near by and, entering her dwelling, were given food and drink. Returning late to the monastery, they came, as was customary, to receive the holy abbot's blessing. He at once asked:

"Where have you been eating?"

"Nowhere," they replied.

"Why do you lie?" he asked. "Did you not enter the house of such and such a woman? Did you not eat such and such food? Did you not drink so and so many cups of wine?"

Now, when the abbot spoke of the hospitable woman, the kinds of food, the number of cups of drink, they admitted all that they had done, cast themselves trembling at his feet and confessed

that they had done wrong. He at once forgave their fault, knowing that they would not offend again in his absence, since they were aware that he was everywhere with them in spirit.

CHAPTER 13.

HOW BENEDICT KNEW THAT THE BROTHER OF THE MONK VALENTINIAN HAD EATEN ON A JOURNEY.

THE brother of Valentinian, a monk already mentioned, was a lay-man and very devout. From his place he came every year, fasting, to the monastery of the man of God that he might commend himself to his prayer and at the same time visit his brother. One day while on his way to the monastery, he was overtaken by another traveller who carried some food with him. When the day was already well advanced, the stranger said:

"Come brother, let us eat, lest we grow weak on the way."

"No, brother, I cannot do this," replied the other, "for I am wont always to be fasting when I visit the venerable abbot Benedict."

Having received this answer, the stranger remained silent for nearly an hour. When they had gone a little farther, the stranger again invited his friend to eat. But the other would not consent since he had resolved to be fasting till he reached the monastery. He that had invited the other

then desisted from urging him and agreed to go with him still for some distance without eating. And when they had walked together for a long time and grown weary from traveling, they came upon a meadow and a spring and whatever else may serve to refresh the body, Then the stranger said:

“Here is water, here is a meadow, a fine place to rest a little while and refresh ourselves that we may finish our journey without difficulty.”

Since the words delighted his ears as much as the sight of the place pleased his eyes, he accepted the third invitation and ate. In the evening he arrived at the monastery. Being admitted to venerable Benedict, he asked for the blessing, but the holy man rebuked him for eating on the way saying:

“How came it to pass, brother, that the evil one, who spoke with you in the guise of a traveller, could not persuade you either the first or the second time, but succeeded the third time, and led you to do what he wished?”

Whereupon the visitor, confessing the weakness of his will, fell at Benedict's feet and was ashamed for his sin, the more so when he had learnt that the venerable man had seen him commit the fault though not present.

PETER

In the interior of that man I see the spirit of Eliseus, who was present to a distant servant.

CHAPTER 14.

HOW KING TOTILA WAS REBUKED FOR A DECEPTION.

GREGORY

IT will be better to remain silent for a little while, Peter, that you may hear still greater wonders. In the days of the Goths, when their king Totila had been informed that Benedict had the gift of prophecy, he decided to visit the holy man at his monastery, but came to a halt a short distance away and sent a messenger to announce his coming. He received answer from the monastery that he might come; but deceitful as he was he tried to discover if the holy man was really endowed with the spirit of prophecy.

He had an esquire named Riggo, whom he ordered to put on the royal shoes and garments and set out in this disguise to the man of God. With Riggo he sent three nobles of his own retinue, namely, Vultericus, Rudericus and Blindinus, that they might walk by the side of the esquire and feign that he was king, in the presence of Benedict himself. He also sent with him other esquires and attendants, that on account of these and the royal vesture the envoy might be taken for the king. Now, when Riggo, wearing the king's garments, entered the monastery with his splendid retinue, he saw the holy man sitting at a dis-

tance. When the latter saw the disguised esquire approaching he said:

"Put off, my son, put off what you are wearing; it does not belong to you."

Riggo at once fell to the earth, and was overcome with fear for presuming to deceive so holy a man. All those who had come with him fell down upon their knees in amazement. After they had risen again they dared not draw near him but returned to their king and told him how the deception had been detected.

CHAPTER 15.

OF THE PROPHECY CONCERNING KING TOTILA.

NEXT, Totila came to visit the holy man in person, and when from afar he saw him sitting he fell to the earth and dared not approach him. Thrice the holy man bade him arise; but when he would not do so, Benedict himself approached the king who was bent to the earth before him, raised him up and rebuked him for his misdeeds. In a few words he foretold what was to happen to the king:

"You are doing much harm, and you have done much harm; desist from your wicked course. You shall, it is true, enter Rome; you shall cross the sea; you shall reign nine years; in the tenth you shall die." Upon hearing this, the king was

stricken with terror. Asking the holy man's blessing he withdrew, and from that time was less cruel. Shortly after, he entered Rome; then passed over to Sicily, but by a judgment of God he lost both his kingdom and his life in the tenth year.

The bishop of Canusium, whom the man of God held in high esteem for the merit of his life, was also accustomed to visit him. While they were one day speaking of Totila's entrance into Rome and of the sack of the city, the bishop observed:

"By this king the city will be laid waste, so that it will no longer be fit to live in."

The man of God replied: "Rome will not be destroyed by these barbarians, but by storms, whirlwinds and lightnings, and will be shaken by earthquakes so that it will fall into ruins."

The truth of this prophecy is now clearer than daylight, for we see how the walls are fallen down, houses and churches demolished by whirlwinds and how the buildings that still remain standing bear the marks of decay. Although Honoratus, his disciple, from whose report I have learned these things, admits that he did not hear them from the lips of the man of God himself, he bears witness that the brethren had told him Benedict had uttered this prophecy.

CHAPTER 16.

OF A CLERIC WHO WAS FREED FROM THE DEMON FOR
A TIME.

AT this very time a cleric of the church of Aquinum was troubled by an evil spirit. He had been sent by the venerable Constantius, bishop of that church, to many tombs of martyrs to find relief. But the holy martyrs of God would not grant him the blessing of health, in order that they might make known of how great a measure of grace Benedict was possessed. This cleric was brought to Benedict, the servant of Almighty God, who prayed to the Lord Jesus Christ, and forthwith the evil spirit was driven out. When the cleric had been restored to health, the man of God commanded him saying:

"Go now; henceforth eat no more flesh meat and never dare to seek promotion to a higher order; on the day that you shall presume to receive a sacred order, you shall again be a slave to the evil spirit." The cleric, now that he was cured, departed.

As a punishment still fresh in one's memory usually deters one from doing wrong, the cleric for a while obeyed what the holy man had enjoined. When, after the lapse of many years, however, his seniors in orders were dead and he saw how the younger clerics were advanced, he

forgot the words of the man of God and received a sacred order. Immediately the devil again took possession of him and continued to worry him till he had driven the soul out of his body.

PETER

This saintly man entered even into the secrets of God, I perceive, since he was aware that this cleric was delivered up to the devil that he might not receive a higher order.

GREGORY

Why should not he that observed the commandments of God not also know the secrets of God, since it is written: "He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit?" (I. Cor. 6. 17.)

PETER

If he that clings to the Lord is one spirit with Him, why does the same Apostle say: "For who hath known the mind of the Lord or who hath been His counsellor?" (Rom. 11. 34.) It seems reasonable that one should know the mind of him with whom he has become one.

GREGORY

In so far as holy men are in union with God they know His mind. The same Apostle says: "For what man knoweth the things of a man, but the spirit of a man that is in him? So the things also that are of God no man knoweth but the

spirit of God." (I. Cor. 2. 11.) In order to show that he knew what was in the mind of God, he continues: "Now we have not received the spirit of this world, but the spirit that is of God." (I. Cor. 2. 12.) and again "That eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man what things God hath prepared for them that love him." (I. Cor. 2. 9.)

PETER

If certain secrets of God were revealed to this Apostle by the Spirit of God, why had he previously said: "O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God! How incomprehensible are his judgments and how unsearchable his ways!" (Rom. 11. 33.) But at this point another question occurs to me: David the prophet says to the Lord: "With my lips I have pronounced all the judgments of thy mouth" (Ps. 118. 13.) Now, since it is a lesser thing to know than to pronounce, why is it that Paul says that the judgments of God are beyond comprehension whereas David says he not only knows them all but also asserts that he has pronounced them with his lips?"

GREGORY

To both of your questions I have briefly given an answer heretofore, when I said that in

so far as holy men are in union with God they know what is in His mind. All devout followers of the Lord are by means of their devotion in union with God and, at the same time, since they still bear the burden of corruptible flesh, they are not in union with Him. Hence they know the secret judgments of God in so far as they are united with Him; hence they say, too, that His judgments are incomprehensible, because they have not yet entirely penetrated the secrets of the divine mind. But since their hearts cling to Him and while clinging to him know as much as is given them, they also impart it to others. The secrets that God does not impart to them they know not; what he tells them, they know. For this reason David, after saying: "With my lips I have pronounced all the judgments" adds "of thy mouth," as if to say distinctly: "I have been able to know and pronounce these judgments which I know Thou didst tell me; for that which Thou thyself dost not impart Thou undoubtedly wishest to be hidden from our minds." Therefore the testimonies of the prophet and of the Apostle agree; that is to say, the judgments of God are incomprehensible and yet, what has been uttered by His mouth, may be proclaimed by human lips, for what God reveals to men may be known by them, not so the things that He conceals from them.

PETER

My question has drawn from you an explanation that makes the matter quite clear to me. But if there are more of this remarkable man's deeds to be told, I would ask you to continue.

CHAPTER 17.

OF THE DESTRUCTION OF HIS MONASTERY FORETOLD
BY THE MAN OF GOD.

GREGORY

A CERTAIN man of rank, Theoporus by name, who had been converted by the preaching of the man of God, enjoyed his intimate confidence by reason of the exemplary life he led. One day, as he entered Benedict's cell, he found him in tears. He waited for a long time; seeing, however, that his tears did not cease, and that he was not praying in his usual manner, but loudly lamenting, he asked what might be the cause of his grief. Benedict replied:

"This entire monastery which I have built, and all that I have provided for the brethren has been delivered up to the barbarians by a judgment of Almighty God. By all my prayer I have scarcely been able to save the lives of those within its walls."

We now see fulfilled the prophecy that Theoporus heard, for we know that the monastery

was destroyed by the Lombards. Not long since they entered at night while the brethren were resting; although they plundered the buildings they did not capture even one of the monks. Thus Almighty God fulfilled what he promised His faithful servant. He suffered the Lombards to ravage the monastery but protected the lives of the brethren. Here I see a resemblance between Benedict and St. Paul who, although his ship suffered the loss of all its goods, was consoled since in answer to his earnest prayer none of his fellow passengers had been lost.

CHAPTER 18.

HOW ST. BENEDICT WAS AWARE OF THE HIDING OF A FLAGON.

ONCE upon a time our friend Exhilaratus, whom you knew as a lay-brother, was sent by his master to convey to Benedict's monastery two flagons of wine, but he concealed one by the way and brought the other to the monastery. The man of God, from whom nothing could be concealed, accepted the flagon with thanks, and said to the young man as the latter was about to depart: "Be careful, my son, do not drink of the flagon that you have concealed; tilt it with caution and you will see what it contains." Much disturbed he left the presence of the man of God. On

his way back, he decided to test the truth of what he had heard; he tilted the flagon and a serpent issued from it. Whereupon the aforesaid youth Exhilaratus dreaded the evil he had done because of what he had found in the wine.

CHAPTER 19.

HOW BENEDICT KNEW THAT A MONK HAD RECEIVED A PRESENT OF SOME HANDKERCHIEFS.

NOT far from the monastery there was a village in which lived not a few persons converted by Benedict's instructions to the true faith from the worship of idols. In the same place there was also a community of devout women, to whom Benedict frequently sent some of the brethren to instruct them. One day he sent one, as usual. After he had given the instruction, these devout women requested him, to receive as a gift a few handkerchiefs, which he hid in his bosom, intending to keep them for his own use. Upon his return to the monastery, the man of God severely rebuked him, saying:

"How did this wickedness creep into your bosom?"

The brother was amazed and as he did not remember what wicked thing he had done, he did not know why he was being rebuked. Then Benedict said:

"Was I not there when you received these handkerchiefs and thrust them into your bosom?"

At once falling at the Abbot's feet, he expressed sorrow for his foolish deed and cast from himself the handkerchiefs that had been presented to him.

CHAPTER 20.

HOW BENEDICT KNEW THE PROUD THOUGHT OF A CERTAIN MONK.

ONE day while the venerable abbot was partaking of bodily nourishment at a late hour of the day, one of his monks, the son of an advocate, stood by the table holding a light. While he stood holding the light in such manner that Benedict could see as he ate, this monk began to entertain such proud thoughts as these: "Who is this man that I must needs stand by his side while he is eating, hold the light for him and serve him?" Turning to him Benedict gave him a stern rebuke saying:

"Sign your heart with the Cross, brother. What are you thinking? Sign your heart with the Cross. |

Immediately summoning the brethren, he ordered the lamp to be taken from his hands; told him to attend him no longer and to sit quietly. When the others asked this brother what he had

in his heart, he told them how he had been filled up with the spirit of pride and what kind of thoughts he had entertained while serving the man of God. Then they all had clear proof that nothing could be concealed from Benedict, since his ear heard even the internal word.

CHAPTER 21.

OF TWO HUNDRED BUSHELS OF FLOUR FOUND AT THE GATE OF THE MONASTERY DURING A FAMINE.

WHILE the province of Campania was suffering in consequence of a drought, and there was a great scarcity of food supplies, the monastery of Benedict was also suffering from want of wheat. All the bread had been eaten with the exception of five loaves and these were to form the meal of the brethren for a day. When the man of God saw how sad they were he reproached them with gentle words for their lack of trust in God and tried to revive their spirits by making them a promise: "Why are your hearts saddened at the sight of these few loaves? There is too little today; tomorrow you shall have enough."

On the following day two hundred bushels of flour in sacks were found at the gate of the monastery. This gift had been sent by Almighty God; even unto this day no one knows by whose hand. When the brethren saw this, they gave thanks to

God, having now learned not to fear that they should have too little even in the time of great need.

PETER

Tell me, pray; are we to believe that this man of God always had the spirit of prophecy, or was his mind filled with it at certain times only?

GREGORY

The spirit of prophecy, Peter, does not continually enlighten the minds of the prophets. It is written of the Holy Spirit: "The Spirit breatheth where he will" (John 3. 8.); hence, you are to understand, that He breathes also when He will. Thus when Nathan was asked by the king if he might build a temple, the prophet at first consented and later withdrew his consent. Thus, too, when Eliseus saw the woman weeping and knew not the cause, he said to the servant who would not permit her to enter: "Let her alone, for her soul is in anguish, and the Lord hath hid it from me and hath not told me." (IV Kings. 4. 27.) For God in His great wisdom saw fit to dispose in this manner. When He at times grants the spirit of prophecy and at times withdraws it, He raises the minds of the prophets upward and keeps them in proper humility, so that when they receive the gift they may learn what they are by

the favor of God; and when they have it not, they may know what they are of themselves.

PETER

There is good reason to think the matter is as you say; but, pray, continue to narrate what occurs to you concerning the venerable abbot.

CHAPTER 22.

HOW THE PLAN FOR A MONASTERY AT TERRACINA
WAS MADE IN A VISION.

GREGORY

AT another time, being requested by one of the faithful to establish a monastery on his lands at Terracina, Benedict consented and dispatched several of the brethren with a superior and an assistant to make the necessary preparations. At their departure he said to them:

"Go, and on a certain day I shall come and point out where the chapel, the refectory, the house for guests and other edifices shall be erected."

Having received his blessing, they at once set out. While waiting for the appointed day, they prepared everything that they deemed necessary for the accommodation of the venerable abbot and those that might come with him. During the night preceding the day appointed, the holy man appeared in their sleep to both the superior and

his assistant and distinctly indicated where they were to build. When they rose from sleep, they told one another what they had seen. Not fully trusting their vision, they continued to wait for the arrival of the man of God as he had promised. But when he failed to come on the day appointed, they returned to him grieving and said:

“Father, we were waiting for you to come as you had promised and to show us where to build, and you did not come.”

“Why do you speak thus?” he replied; “did I not come as I promised?”

“When did you come?” they asked.

“Did I not appear to both of you in your sleep and point out each place? Go now, and build everything as I instructed you in the vision.”

When they heard this, they marvelled exceedingly, returned to Terracina and set up the buildings as they had been told.

PETER

I should like to know how it was possible for him to go far away and give them instructions while they were asleep, so that they heard and understood.

GREGORY

Why do you doubt because you do not understand how this was done? It is quite evident that the soul can move more rapidly from place to place

than the body. We know from the authority of Holy Scripture that the prophet was lifted up in the province of Judea and in a moment of time was set down in Chaldea, where he refreshed another prophet with food, and in another moment of time found himself again in Judea. If, then, Habacuc, could go such a distance in a moment and carry with him another's dinner, why should you wonder that by God's grace Benedict was enabled to go in spirit and give the sleeping brethren the necessary instructions for building, for just as the prophet went in the body to supply some one with bodily food so Benedict went in spirit to communicate to spirit.

PETER

Your explanation has removed from my mind every doubt; but I should be pleased to learn what kind of man he was in ordinary conversation.

CHAPTER 23.

HOW CERTAIN RELIGIOUS WERE RESTORED TO CHRISTIAN COMMUNION AFTER DEATH.

GREGORY

NOT even his ordinary speech was lacking in power, for, as his heart always dwelt upon heavenly things, he never uttered a word that was not to the purpose. When, however, he said some-

thing in the way not of imparting information but in the way of reprimand or threat, his speech was so powerful that what he said was not vague or uncertain but definite.

Not far from his monastery two religious women of distinguished origin led a devout life in a place apart; their temporal affairs were administered by a very religious man. But as persons of noble descent sometimes have ignoble minds and the greater they deem themselves to have been than others, the less they despise themselves in this world, these women had not as yet been successful in governing their tongues so as to be in conformity with their garb. They were in the habit of provoking the man who attended to their temporal wants, by ill-natured words. He bore with them for a long time, but finally went to the man of God and told him how much he had to suffer from their insulting language. The man of God at once sent word to the women saying:

"Check your tongues; if you do not I shall excommunicate you." He did not actually inflict the sentence of excommunication, but only threatened it. They, however, did not in any measure amend their conduct; a few days later they died and were buried in the church. While Holy Mass was being celebrated one day in that church, and the deacon as usual proclaimed: "Those who do not communicate will withdraw," the nurse who

had generally presented the offering on behalf of these women saw them issue from the tomb and leave the church. When she had repeatedly observed that they went out at those words of the deacon and could not remain within the church, it occurred to her what the man of God had enjoined upon them; namely that he would deprive them of communion unless they amended their conduct and language. With great sorrow the incident was reported to the man of God, who with his own hand presented an offering, saying:

"Go and make the oblation for them, and they will no longer be excommunicated."

When the oblation had been made for them and the deacon had pronounced the customary words, that all who did not communicate should withdraw, they were not again seen to leave the church. It was now clear beyond a doubt that since they no longer withdrew with those that did not communicate they had been re-admitted to communion by the servant of God.

PETER

It is wonderful that this venerable and most holy man, although still dwelling in corruptible flesh, could release souls that already stood before the invisible judgment seat of God.

GREGORY

Was not he that heard these words still in the flesh: "Whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth, it shall be bound also in Heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, it shall be loosed also in Heaven?" (Matt. 16. 19.) Those who now rule the Church in his stead, also receive the power of binding and loosing. That man might have power to do this on earth, the Creator of heaven and earth came down upon earth from heaven, and that mortal man might judge spirits God granted him the power, having Himself been made flesh for man's sake, for our weakness was raised above itself when the power of God became weakened, as it were, and descended beneath itself.

PETER

Your words satisfactorily explain by what power these miracles were wrought.

CHAPTER 24.

OF A YOUTHFUL MONK CAST FORTH FROM THE TOMB.

ONE day as a young monk who was excessively attached to his parents left the monastery for his home without receiving the abbot's blessing, and died the same day shortly after his arrival. He was buried, but on the following day the body was found lying outside of the grave. It was in-

tered for a second time, but on the next day was again found disinterred. Then the people had recourse to Benedict and with tears besought him to restore the boy to his favor. He at once gave them a consecrated host and said:

"Go and lay the Body of the Lord upon his breast with great reverence and bury him once more.'

They did so and the earth did not again cast him forth.

You perceive, Peter, how deserving this man was in the eyes of Jesus Christ, since the earth would cast him forth that did not enjoy the favor of Benedict.

PETER

I see it clearly and am greatly amazed.

CHAPTER 25.

OF A MONK WHO ENCOUNTERED A DRAGON AS HE WAS LEAVING THE MONASTERY.

GREGORY

A CERTAIN monk of Benedict's monastery yielding to the fickleness of his mind, decided not to remain in the monastery. He was frequently exhorted by the man of God and also reprimanded; but he was not willing to remain with the community and obstinately persisted in

his request to be permitted to leave. One day, the abbot, wearied by his continual importunities, told him to depart. As the monk was leaving the monastery he encountered on the way a dragon with its mouth wide open. When he saw that the dragon was approaching as if to devour him, he trembled and cried with a loud voice: "Help, help! a dragon is threatening to devour me!" The brethren who hurried to the spot saw no dragon, but led the breathless and trembling monk back to the monastery. He promised never again to leave, and from that hour remained faithful to his promise, for it was due to the prayers of the holy man that he actually beheld before him the dragon whom had had been previously following though he saw him not.

CHAPTER 26.

OF A SERVANT CURED OF LEPROSY.

IMUST not pass over in silence what I heard from the illustrious Antonius, who told me that one of his father's servants had been suffering from the horrible disease known as elephantiasis; his hair were falling out, his skin was swelling and could not conceal the corruption bred beneath it. He was sent to the man of God by his master and was shortly restored to good health.

CHAPTER 27.

OF MONEY MIRACULOUSLY SUPPLIED FOR PAYING A DEBT.

NOR ought I omit to relate what his disciple Peregrinus was wont to tell. One day a Christian lay-man who was obliged to pay a creditor, believed that there was but one way out of his difficulty, and that was to go to the man of God and explain his embarrassment. So he came to the monastery and found the servant of God whom he told how his creditor was pressing him for twelve gold pieces due him. The venerable abbot did not have twelve gold pieces with which to help him, but gently consoled him in his need saying:

"Come again after two days; I can give you nothing today."

During the two days that followed, Benedict as usual devoted himself to fervent prayer. When the poor debtor came back on the third day, some one discovered thirteen gold pieces within the monastery, lying upon a chest filled with grain. The man of God ordered the money to be brought, gave it to the worried debtor telling him to pay his debt with twelve gold pieces and keep the thirteenth for himself.

Now I shall return to tell what I have learned from those disciples of his mentioned in the beginning of this book.

A certain man was suffering so much from the hatred of a rival that the latter secretly poisoned the other's drink. Although it was not strong enough to cause death, it changed the color of his skin, so that it was covered with spots of different colors, resembling leprosy. But being led before the man of God he was restored to health, for as soon as Benedict touched him all the colored spots disappeared.

CHAPTER 28.

OF A FLASK OF GLASS THAT WAS NOT BROKEN WHEN THROWN UPON A ROCK.

DURING the time that Campania was suffering from a great scarcity of food the man of God distributed provisions among so great a number of the needy that only a little oil remained in a glass vessel in the cellar. At that time a certain subdeacon, Agapitus by name, came to ask for a little oil. The holy man, who had determined to give away everything on earth in order that he might receive it again in heaven, ordered the little that was left to be given to this subdeacon. The brother, however, who had charge of the cellar, although he heard the order, did not obey it. When he was shortly after asked if he had done what he had been told, he said he had not given away the oil, for if he had done so, none would have been

left for the brethren. Indignant over the disobedience of the cellarer, Benedict commanded another monk to throw the vessel in which so little oil seemed to be left, out of the window, last anything remain in the monastery as a result of disobedience. It was done as he commanded. Now, below the window there was a steep precipice, the side of which was hard, rugged rock. The vessel that had been cast forth struck against the rock but suffered no harm whatever, as little as if it had not been thrown out. It was neither broken, nor was any of the oil spilled. The man of God ordered it to be brought back and to be given him that had asked for it. Then assembling the brethren he reprimanded the monk for lack of faith and for his disobedience.

CHAPTER 29.

OF THE EMPTY CASK THAT WAS FILLED WITH OIL.

HAVING given the reprimand he betook himself to prayer together with the brethren. In that very place in which he was praying with the brethren stood an empty oil-cask. While the holy man was fervently praying, the cover was lifted by the oil rising beneath it. When the cover was taken off, the oil rose so high that it flowed over the brim of the vessel and flooded the floor of the place in which the brethren were praying.

As soon as Benedict saw this, he at once ceased praying, and the oil ceased to flow down upon the floor. Then he reproached the doubting and disobedient brother at some length, telling him, he should learn to believe and to be humble. The brother blushed when he received this wholesome correction, for the venerable abbot had shown forth by miracles the power of God, to which he had referred in his reprimand, for there was no reason to doubt the promises of one that had given them, at one and the same moment, a cask filled with oil in return for an almost empty oil cruet.

CHAPTER 30.

OF A MONK FREED FROM THE DEVIL.

ONE day while he was on his way to the oratory of St. John, which stood on the summit of the mountain, he met the ancient enemy in guise of a physician carrying a horn and a mortar. When he inquired whither he was going, the would-be physician replied: "I am going to prepare a potion for the brethren." Thereupon Benedict continued on his way to the oratory, but returned immediately after he had finished his prayers. The wicked spirit had found an old brother drawing water, at once entered into him, cast him upon the ground and horribly tor-

mented him. When the man of God, returning from prayer, saw how the brother was suffering, he gave him a light blow with his hand, and immediately expelled the evil spirit, who did not dare to return.

PETER

Kindly tell me, whether these astounding miracles were always wrought through the power of prayer, or whether he did not at times work them by the mere strength of his will.

GREGORY

Those who are in close union with God may, if necessity requires, accomplish marvellous things in either way, sometimes by prayer, sometimes by a power given them. St. John says: "But as many as received him, he gave them power to be made sons of God" (John 1. 12.). Now, if they are made children of God by power, is it anything wonderful if they can work miracles by that power? That they may work miracles in either of these two ways is evident from the fact that St. Peter raised Tabitha from death by praying over her, and delivered up Ananias and Saphira to death by merely rebuking them. We do not read that he prayed when they fell down dead, but only that he rebuked them for the wrong they had done. It is clear, accordingly, that they do such things sometimes by the power given them and some-

times by prayer, for, in the one instance life was taken away by a rebuke, in the other restored by prayer. I shall now relate two acts of the servant of God Benedict, from which you may see that he was enabled to do the one by power received from God, the other by prayer.

CHAPTER 31.

OF A CAPTIVE PEASANT FREED FROM HIS BONDS BY A MERE LOOK.

THERE was a certain Goth, Zalla by name and an Arian, who most cruelly persecuted Catholic religious in the days of king Totila. No monk or cleric upon whom his eye fell escaped his hands alive. One day while burning with greed and lust for pillage, he seized a peasant and tortured him in various ways. Overcome by pain, the peasant confessed that he had placed himself and his possessions in the keeping of Benedict. He said this in order that his tormentor might, if he believed his confession, desist from his cruelty and suffer his captive to live.

Zalla did, indeed, cease to torture the poor peasant, but binding his arms with strong cords made him walk before his horse and show him the man Benedict, in whose keeping the peasant's possessions were said to be. The peasant thus bound walked ahead of Zalla's horse and conducted

the Goth to the monastery, where Benedict was sitting near the entrance, reading. The peasant spoke to the fierce Zalla, who followed him:

“There is the man of whom I spoke, the abbot Benedict.”

Zalla, thinking he might intimidate the man of God by his fierceness, addressed him in a loud voice saying:

“Rise—rise! and deliver up the property of this man that you have in your keeping.”

Hearing the voice, the man of God for a moment raised his eyes from his book, looked at the Goth steadily, and then turned his attention to the peasant held captive in bonds. When Benedict cast his eyes upon the man’s arms, the bonds loosened themselves and were unfastened more swiftly than it could have been done by human hands. And when the man who had come bound with cords stood there before him free, Zalla, dismayed by this great display of power, fell to the earth and, bending his cruel neck before the holy man, asked for his prayer. Benedict would not, however, interrupt his reading, but, summoning the brethren, bade them lead Zalla in and serve him some refreshments. When Zalla returned to Benedict, the latter exhorted him to abandon his wanton cruelty. Being now subdued, Zalla made no more demands of the peasant whom the man of God had freed from his bonds by a mere look.

For this reason, Peter, I said that those who are very faithful in the service of God, sometimes have power to work miracles. He that checked the fury of this dreaded Goth without rising from his seat, and with a mere glance of the eye loosed the knots in the cords that bound the arms of that innocent man showed, by the very swiftness with which the miracle was wrought, that he had received the power to do what he said.

And now I shall relate a remarkable miracle which he wrought by his prayer.

CHAPTER 32.

OF A DEAD CHILD RESTORED TO LIFE.

ONE day when Benedict had gone out with the brethren to work in the field, a peasant bearing the dead body of a child in his arms, came weeping to the monastery and inquired for the holy abbot. When he was told that the abbot was out in the field with the brethren, he at once laid down the corpse at the gate of the monastery and driven by his grief ran to meet him. At that very time Benedict was returning from the field with the brethren. As soon as the afflicted peasant caught sight of him he began to clamor: "Give me back my child! give me back my child!" At these words the holy abbot stood still and asked: "Did I take your child away from you?"

"He is dead; come, restore him to life!" he replied.

When the servant of God heard this request, he grew sad and said:

"Go, brethren; this is not a miracle for us to work, but for the holy Apostles. Why would you place a burden upon us that we cannot bear?"

But the man, unable to repress his grief, persisted in his petition and swore he would not depart until he had been heard. Then the servant of God inquired where the child was. The man replied:

"The body is lying at the door of the monastery."

When Benedict arrived there with the brethren, he fell upon his knees, bent low over the body of the child; then kneeling upright he raised his hands towards heaven saying:

"Lord, look not upon my sins, but upon the faith of this man who prays that his son be restored to life; give back to this body the soul Thou hast taken away from it."

He had scarcely finished his prayer when the body began to quiver as the soul re-entered it. All those standing about saw how the body trembled as if it had received a powerful shock. Benedict forthwith took the child by the hand and restored him alive and sound to his father. Plainly, Peter, he had not the power to perform this mir-

acle, since he had to prostrate himself and pray that it might be wrought.

PETER

I am quite convinced that all is as you say, for you prove every assertion by facts. But tell me; can such holy men do all things that they wish, and obtain everything they desire, by their prayer?

CHAPTER 33.

OF THE MIRACLE OF HIS SISTER SCHOLASTICA.

GREGORY

WILL there ever be a better man in the world than was St. Paul, who thrice complained of the sting of the flesh, yet could not obtain that for which he prayed? For this reason I must tell you of an incident in the life of the venerable abbot, from which you may infer that there was something he wished to do, yet could not do.

He had a sister, Scholastica by name, who had been consecrated to God in her childhood. She was accustomed to visit him once a year, and the man of God would come down and meet her not far from the gate of the monastery in a place belonging to it. One day, according to his custom, he came, accompanied by several of the brethren, to meet her. They spent the entire day in prayer

and pious discourse and, as darkness was setting in, sat down to partake of food together. While they were yet sitting at the table, after several hours spent in edifying conversation his sister asked him:

"Please, brother, do not leave me tonight, but let us speak of the delights of heaven till dawn."

"Impossible, sister," he replied; "I must not remain outside of the monastery."

The weather was very fine at the time and not a cloud was to be seen in the sky. When the religious woman heard him refuse her request, she placed her folded hands upon the table and bowed her head down upon them in prayer to Almighty God. When she raised her head from the table lightnings were flashing and thunders roaring, and the rain poured down in such torrents that neither Benedict nor the brethren that attended him could move a step outside of the place in which they were. While she had been bowing her head over her hands she had shed a flood of tears and the clear sky was overcast with rain clouds. Very little time elapsed between her prayer and the rainfall; in fact, she raised her head at the first sound of the thunder; so that one may say the lifting up of her head and the beginning of the rainfall occurred at the same instant. While

it was lightening and thundering and a heavy rain was falling, Benedict, seeing that it was impossible for him to return to the monastery, began to reproach her, saying:

"May Almighty God forgive you, sister; what have you done?"

"I asked a favor of you," she replied, "and you refused to hear me; I asked my Lord and he has heard me. Leave now, if you can, leave me here and go back to your monastery."

He could not go out of the house and so was obliged to remain against his will. And so it came to pass that they watched throughout the night and delighted one another with devout conversation.

For this reason I said there was something that he wished to do yet could not do, for if we search the mind of the venerable abbot there can be no doubt that he wished the weather to remain as it had been during the day, when he came down from the mountain, and yet, contrary to what he wished, a miracle was wrought through the powerful prayer of a woman. It is no wonder that on this occasion she was more powerful than her brother whom she had yearned to see, for St. John says: "God is love;" and therefore it was quite right that she had the greater power, since her love was greater.

PETER

I am exceedingly well pleased with what you are telling me.

CHAPTER 34.

HOW HE SAW THE SOUL OF HIS SISTER LEAVING HER BODY.

GREGORY

WHEN, on the day following, this devout woman had gone back to her own monastery, the man of God also returned to his. On the third day after this meeting, while he was in his cell, he raised his eyes towards heaven; he saw the soul of his sister leaving her body and flying heavenward under the appearance of a dove. Filled with joy at her happy lot, he gave thanks to God in hymns of praise, and announced her death to the brethren. He at once sent some of them to convey her body to his monastery and lay it in a tomb that he had prepared for himself. And thus it was brought about that the bodies of these two, whose souls were always one in God, were not even separated by the tomb.

CHAPTER 35.

OF THE WORLD SEEN IN A VISION, AND OF THE SOUL OF GERMANUS, BISHOP OF THE CITY OF CAPUA.

ON another occasion Servandus, a deacon, and abbot of the monastery which the patrician

Liberius had founded in Campania, came to pay him a visit, as he was accustomed to do. He often came to visit Benedict, in order that as both were well informed in spiritual matters, they might edify one another by their discourse and partake, at least in desire, of the heavenly food which they could not yet perfectly enjoy. When the hour for silence came Benedict retired to the upper room of the tower in which he dwelt, while Servandus was lodged in the room below, both rooms being connected by an open stairway. Adjoining this tower was an extensive building in which the brethren both of Benedict and of his guest were sleeping. While all were asleep, Benedict was watching and praying even before the usual hour for common prayer. While standing at the window and praying to Almighty God at a very late hour of the night, he suddenly saw how the darkness was pierced by a light more dazzling than that of the sun. Then he beheld a marvellous sight; for, as he afterwards himself related, the whole world was brought before his eyes, gathered, as it were, in a single ray of the sun. And while he was still intently gazing upon this splendor he saw the soul of Germanus, bishop of Capua, in the shape of a burning sphere borne up to heaven by Angels. Wishing to have a witness for this astounding vision, he loudly called for the deacon Servandus two or three times. As the latter was

alarmed by the loud calls at such an unusual time, he rose at once, went up the stairs, looked around him and still saw a little of the light. When Benedict told his astonished visitor all that he had seen, he immediately sent word to the devout Theoporus in the town of Cassinum asking him to despatch a messenger to Capua that very night to find out what had happened to Bishop Germanus. It was so done; the messenger found the bishop dead and, upon inquiring, learned that he had died at the very time when Benedict saw his soul carried up to heaven.

PETER

Wonderful! amazing! But when you say that the whole world was displayed before his eyes as if gathered in a ray of sunlight, I must confess I do not understand, for I have never experienced any such thing. How could the whole world be seen by one man?

GREGORY

Peter, impress deeply upon your memory what I am going to say: When the soul sees God it sees how insignificant all creatures are. However little one may behold of the heavenly light, all that is created will appear small and trifling, for by the light of contemplation the range of his vision is enlarged to such an extent that his mind rises far above the world; it even rises above it-

self, and when it is rapt above itself in contemplation, its capacity is enlarged; and when from its height it beholds itself far beneath itself, it understands how insignificant is that which it could not understand in its lowly condition. Therefore, the man of God, when he saw the fiery sphere and also the angels ascending to Heaven, could surely see these things but in the light of contemplation. What wonder, then, that he saw the whole world before his eyes when his soul was raised far above the world by this light? When I say that the whole world was presented before his eyes, you are not to understand that heaven and earth were reduced to a smaller shape, but that the spiritual eye of the seer was enlarged; rapt in the contemplation of God, he was privileged to see without any difficulty everything that is beneath God. While, therefore, that exterior light shone into his eyes, his soul was illuminated by an interior light that raised it above itself and showed how small are all things that are beneath it.

PETER

I see it is well for me not to have understood at first what you said, for my slow understanding has drawn from you this explanation which makes the matter clear. Now, since you have enlightened me upon this point, I would ask you to resume your narrative.

CHAPTER (36.)

THAT HE WROTE A RULE FOR MONKS.

GREGORY

IT would give me much pleasure to relate many other things about this venerable abbot, but I must pass over a number of them, because I must speak of the deeds of other holy men also. This, however, I would have you know, that while the man of God was famous for the many miracles that he wrought, he was no less distinguished for his wisdom in matters pertaining to religious life. He wrote a rule for monks, a book commendable both for its good sense and attractive style. If any one wishes to study his character and manner of life more closely, he will find it embodied in the precepts of that rule, for he could have not taught otherwise than he lived.

CHAPTER (37.)

OF THE PROPHECY MADE TO THE BRETHREN CONCERNING HIS DEATH.

IN the very same year in which he was to die he made known the day of his death both to the brethren who were with him and to those that were far off, enjoining upon those who were with him not to mention what they had heard and pointing out to those who were elsewhere by

what signs they might know when his soul was leaving the body.

On the sixth day before his death he caused his tomb to be opened. Shortly after, he was seized with a burning fever that rapidly wasted his frame. When his weakness grew as the days passed on, he had himself carried to the oratory by his disciples, strengthened himself for his departure by receiving the Body and Blood of the Lord and resting his feeble body upon the arms of his brethren he stood with his hands raised toward Heaven and breathed forth his soul in prayer. On that very day he appeared in a similar vision to two brethren, one of whom was within and the other outside of the monastery. They saw a path covered with tapestry and brightened by countless lights leading in a straight line from his cell toward the east and up into heaven. A man of venerable aspect standing beside it, asked for whom that way had been prepared. They said that they knew not. Then he said: "This is the way by which, Benedict, beloved of the Lord, has gone to heaven. Then, even as those disciples who were present saw him die, so those who were absent knew by this sign that he had departed. He was buried in the oratory of St. John the Baptist, which he had built on the spot where he had destroyed the altar of Apollo.

Even unto this day his sanctity is witnessed

by miracles wrought in the cave in which he had once dwelt (at Subjaco); if the faith of those that have recourse to him in prayer so requires.

CHAPTER 38.

OF AN INSANE WOMAN HEALED IN HIS CAVE.

WHAT I am about to relate now, happened recently. There was a demented woman, who had so completely lost her senses that she would stray over hills, valleys and plains by day and by night, and would rest only when she was overcome by fatigue. One day in the course of her aimless wanderings she came upon the cave of blessed Benedict, and, without being aware of that fact, entered it and remained there for the night. The next morning she came forth from the cave in full possession of her senses as if she had never been afflicted with insanity, and she remained sane for the rest of her life.

PETER

How may it be explained that miracles are more frequently wrought by objects that belonged to the holy martyrs than through their bodies themselves, and that greater marvels are wrought where the martyrs do themselves not repose?

GREGORY

Where the dead bodies of the holy martyrs lie, there can be no doubt that they can and actually

do work remarkable miracles in behalf of those who piously and confidently invoke them. But as some not strong in faith may doubt that the holy martyrs will be able to hear them where their bodies are not, they must of necessity display greater signs where sceptical minds may think that they are not present at all. But those who have unfaltering faith in God will have so much greater a reward for their faith, the more fully they are aware that the bodies of the holy martyrs are not present and yet may hear the prayers of those that have recourse to them. Hence, in order to increase the faith of His disciples, the Eternal Truth said to them: "If I go not, the Paraclete, will not come to you. (John 16. 7.) For since it is certain that the Spirit, the Paraclete, always proceeds from the Father and the Son, why does the Son say that He will go in order that he may come that never departs from the Son? But since the disciples who saw the Son in the flesh longed to see Him always with the eyes of their body, He justly said to them: "If I go not the Paraclete will not come to you," as if to say: If I do not withdraw my body, I cannot show you what the love of the Spirit is, and unless you no longer see me with your eyes of the body, you will never learn to love me with your spirit.

PETER

I am well pleased with your answer.

GREGORY

Let us cease speaking for a little while that in silence we may recover the strength that we shall require for describing the miracles of other holy men.

Notes

PROLOGUE

1. Benedict—The Latin word *benedictus* means “blessed.”
2. Nursia. A town, now called Norcia, in the province of Umbria, Italy. It was formerly an episcopal see. The place is mentioned in Virgil;
quos frigida misit

Nursia. (Aneid VII.)

The year of St. Benedict's birth is assumed to be 480.

3. Constantine. Paul the Deacon (*De gest. Long.* IV 18) writes: “After blessed Benedict came Constantine; after the latter Simplicius; after him Vitalis; the last was Bonitus.” The last named is supposed to have established the Lateran monastery in Rome, of which Valentinian was the first abbot, about 581.
4. Valentinian. see Note 3. † about 560.
5. Simplicius. He was the third abbot of Monte Cassino and died about 570.
6. Honoratus, second abbot of Subjaco, died about 596.

CHAPTER 1.

1. Nurse. One tradition calls her Cyrilla.
2. Enfide. The name is met in various forms. At present the place is called Affide or Affile; it is about 2 miles from Subjaco.
3. Sieve. The Latin has *capisterium*. It was probably a shallow vessel used for winnowing or cleaning grain.
4. Lombards. The Longobardi (or Langobardi) were a northern tribe that had taken root in Italy in

the sixth century. Their name survives in the province of Lombardy, of which Milan is the chief city.

5. Sublacus. At present Subjaco, on the banks of the Anio, a tributary of the Tiber. The monastery is situated in the mountains about 2 miles from the town.
6. Romanus. He is venerated as a saint on May 22. There is a tradition that he subsequently went into Gaul and founded the monastery of Font-rouge.
7. Adeodatus. The name is also found in the forms of Deodatus, or Theodatus. There were monks before St. Benedict, but the monastic life was very poorly organized.

CHAPTER 3.

1. The monastery of which Benedict was invited to be abbot is said to have been that of Vicovaro on the left bank of the Anio between Subjaco and Tivoli. Mabillon (*Iter Ital.*) and Montfaucon (*Diarium Ital.*) describe the site in detail.
2. Twelve monasteries. These were, according to Wion:
1) S. Maria in Primerana, 2) *Vita aeterna*. 3) S. Michael Archangelus, 4) Angelus, 5) Archangelus, 6) S. Angelus de Threni, 7) S. Joannes Baptista, 8) S. Clemens Papa, 9) S. Blasius, 10) S. Donatus, 11) S. S. Cosmas and Damianus, 12) S. Hieronymus.
3. Equitius. Also called Aeqitius, or Ecticius.
4. Maurus and Placidus were the first "oblates" of the Benedictine order.

CHAPTER 4.

1. Mental prayer. The Latin has *studium orationis*, but the contents suggest that here is a form of prayer distinct from psalmody or oral prayer.

CHAPTER 6.

1. Goth. The Goths were a northern tribe who had descended upon Italy in the 5th century and so firmly established themselves that they were the lords of central Italy at the time of St. Benedict.

CHAPTER 7.

1. By the hair. Placidus, although here called a monk was still but an oblate or a novice. In the early centuries it was customary for novices to wear their hair long, although they wore the monastic garb, or some part of it.
2. Robe. The original has *meloten*. This is the equivalent for a cowl or cuculla. Paul the Deacon says: "The garment which the Gallic monks call cuculla and we *cappa*, we ought to call *melote*." It corresponds to the ample choir cloak used at present.

CHAPTER 8.

1. Communion. In the early centuries it was customary for bishops and priests to exchange tokens of Christian fellowship, or communion, by means either of the Eucharistic species or of blessed bread (*eulogia*). The council of Laodicea in the fourth century prohibited the use of the Eucharist for this purpose. The bread was blessed at Mass and transmitted by messenger.
2. Porch. *Solarium*: an elevated place, balcony or roof of a portico, upon which the ancients enjoyed the sun.
3. Maurus. Not identical with Maurus, son of Equitius mentioned in Chap. 3. The original speaks of him as "Maurus nomine."
4. Casinum, or Cassinum, later on known as San Germano, at present as Cassino, lies at the foot of

Monte Cassino, on the Latin Way between Rome and Naples.

5. Apollo. Like other preachers of the faith St. Benedict destroyed idols, not temples.
6. Martin. Blessed Martin here mentioned is generally supposed to be Saint Martin of Tours († ab. 400)
7. Converted them. St. Thomas Aquinas mentions this fact (Opusc. 19. 4) to prove that it is lawful for monks to preach.

CHAPTER 9.

1. Monastery. The original has *habitacula cellae*, the dwelling of the monks; the word *cella* signifies the monastery i. e. the whole group including oratory shops, stables etc. Benedictine monks did not live in cells, in the modern sense of that word. Theirs was life in common. Cells were used for particular purposes, such as lodging guests or the sick.

CHAPTER 11.

1. Official. *Curialis*; some kind of public or civic functionary. St. Benedict's disciples were not all of mean extraction; witness Maurus, Placidus and the son of an advocate (defensor) in chap. 20.

CHAPTER 12.

1. Forgave their fault, *Culpae pepercit*. Some readings are to the effect that he enjoined a penance for the transgression.

CHAPTER 14.

1. Totila, or Baduila, was an Ostrogothic king (542—† 552). From the date of his death that of St. Benedict's death is computed. See also chap. 15. "He prosecuted the war against the forces of the

eastern Emperor (in Italy) not only with great success but also with generosity and humanity."
(*ew Intern. Encycl.*)

2. Esquire. The original has *spatharius*, literally a sword bearer, but the term was probably used to designate any armed member of the retinue.
3. Shoes. They were apparently the chief means of distinguishing rank. Haeftenius says that the Roman plebeians wore white shoes, while those of the senators were red and those of the emperor purple.

CHAPTER 15.

1. In the tenth. See N. 1 to Chap. 14.
2. Sicily. Some conjecture that during this invasion of Sicily St. Placidus and his companions were slain, and his monastery destroyed.
3. Canusium, now Canosa (not identical with Canossa), a town in Apulia on the river Aufidus, about 3 miles from Cannae. The bishop here referred to was Sabinus, or Savinus, whom Gregory mentions several times in his books of Dialogues. He is honored as a Saint on Feb. 9.

CHAPTER 16.

1. Aquinum, now Aquino, about 5 miles from Monte Cassino, is the birth-place of St. Thomas Aquinas who received his earliest training in the great monastery founded by St. Benedict.
2. Constantius, bishop of Aquino, died after 560 and is venerated as a Saint on Sept. 1.
3. Tombs of martyrs—Either the place of their actual interment or places where their remains were preserved in shrines or beneath altars.

CHAPTER 17.

1. **Lombards.** The monastery of Monte Cassino was destroyed about 590 by the Lombards, under duke Zoto of Beneventum, and remained in a state of desolation for almost 130 years. It was restored about 720 by abbot Petronax.

CHAPTER 19.

1. **Handkerchiefs.** The original has *mappulae*—literally napkins or kerchiefs.

CHAPTER 20.

1. **Advocate.** The original calls him *defensor*, a lawyer, advocate. (See note to C. 11.) There were two kinds of “defensores;” civil and ecclesiastical; the former were lawyers, the latter were wardens of churches or of the poor.

CHAPTER 21.

1. **Famine.** According to the historian Procopius (l. II de Bello Gothicō) there was famine as the result of a drought in Italy in 538. (539)
2. **Campania.** The province in which Monte Cassino is situated.

CHAPTER 22.

1. **Terracina,** the ancient Anxur, is a city in Latium, modern province of Rome, about 75 miles southeast of Rome, on the shores of the Tyrrhenian Sea.

CHAPTER 23.

1. **Excommunication.** Whether St. Benedict actually excommunicated or only threatened the women with his severe ecclesiastical penalty is not clear; at all events it would appear that he exercised

some measure of canonical jurisdiction over these
women.

CHAPTER 24.

1. Body of the Lord. This is not an isolated instance of the placing of the Eucharistic species in the tomb. Menard mentions a number of instances in which the Eucharist was laid upon the bosom of the dead in the tomb. Bishops were buried in this way. Some writers—perhaps rightly, suppose that the Eucharist was indeed placed upon the breast of the deceased, but removed before the final closing of the tomb.

CHAPTER 26.

1. Elephantiasis—*Morbo elephantiaco* in the original.

CHAPTER 30.

1. Physician. The original has *mulomedici*, a veterinary.
2. Mortar. In the narrative the pretended physician is described as carrying a horn and a *tripedica*, here translated by mortar. The meaning of *tripedica* or *trepidica* is obscure. In Du Cange's Glossarium it appears as *tripetica*.

CHAPTER 31.

1. Zalla, also known as Galla.

CHAPTER 33.

1. Scholastica, the sister of St. Benedict. Tosti (St. Benedict p. 174) says, Benedict and Scholastica were twins, and that Scholastica was abbess in a small house of religious women at Plumbariola (Piumarola), in the neighborhood of Aquino. The early monasteries, like many of a later age, had estates assigned or bequeathed to them for

their support by generous founders or benefactors. Some of them were occupied by tenants; possibly the rustic in chap. 31 was one of them.

CHAPTER 34.

1. Third day. The memorable third day was February 10th on which the feast of St. Scholastica is still celebrated.
2. Tomb. Her remains were first interred at Monte Cassino, later they were, in part at least, carried to Le Mans in France. In 874 the greater part was brought to Juvigny-sur-Loison; in 1906 a part was taken back to Le Mans.

CHAPTER 35.

1. Servandus, deacon and abbot of St. Sebastian's at Alatri, ab. 30 miles from Monte Cassino.
2. Germanus, bishop of Capua. † Oct 30, 540.
3. Vision. Saint Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas speak of this remarkable vision. The former says: "The whole world was not condensed within one ray of sunlight, but his spirit was enlarged, since he saw all things in Him, in comparison with whose greatness, every creature is small and insignificant." (De lumin. Eccl. sermo 20). And St. Thomas; "From these words of Gregory we are not given to understand that blessed Benedict in that vision saw God in His essence, but he wished to show that, since to *one that sees the Creator every creature is small*, it follows that all things may easily be seen in consequence of illumination by a divine light." (Summa theol. II. 2. 180. 5). Reference to this vision is made in the Preface of the Mass of St. Benedict.

CHAPTER 37.

1. **Death.** The date assigned for the death of St. Benedict is March 21. The feast commemorates the passing (*Transitus*) of St. Benedict; a feast of Solemn Commemoration is celebrated July 11.

CHAPTER 38.

1. **Objects.** *Patrocinia* (neut. pl.) in medieval writings often means relics, be they bodies, parts of bodies, objects or articles worn or used by Saints. The cave (Saero Speco) inhabited by St. Benedict is still visited by great numbers of pilgrims at the present day.

The Life of St. Benedict

(arranged in chronological order.)

A. D.

480. St. Benedict is born at Nursia in Italy; his parents are called Eupropius and Abundantia.
487. He is sent to Rome for study.
493. He quits Rome to save his soul in solitude, away from the wickedness of Roman youth. At Enfide he works the first miracle by making whole a broken sieve. (ch. 1).
494. He leaves his nurse secretly and goes alone to Subjaco, where he meets St. Romanus, who gives him the religious habit and encourages him in his enterprise. He lives in a cave at Subjaco for three years. (ch. 1)
497. He is visited on Easter Sunday by a priest; afterwards is discovered by some shepherds. He overcomes the impure spirit. (ch. 1. and 2.)
509. The fame of his sanctity is spread, many leave the world to put themselves under his spiritual direction. (ch. 3)
510. He consents to govern a community of monks at a place supposed to be Vicovaro. Here he breaks the poisoned cup with a sign

of the Cross; then returns to his former abode near Subjaco (ch. 3.)—According to a tradition this is the year in which St. Maurus was born.

511. Between this year and the year 529 St. Benedict builds twelve monasteries in the country about Subjaco. (ch. 3.)
515. According to tradition St. Placidus was born this year.
522. Sts. Maurus and Placidus are brought to Subjaco by their parents and receive from St. Benedict's hands the habit of the Order. (ch. 3.)
523. St. Maurus at the command of St. Benedict walks upon the waters and rescues St. Placidus from drowning. (ch. 7.)
529. In order to escape annoyances from Florentius, St. Benedict abandons Subjaco and goes to Monte Cassino, between Rome and Naples. (ch. 8.) The monasteries about Subjaco, however, continue to exist.
530. On the summit of Monte Cassino he finds a pagan temple dedicated to Apollo. He breaks the idol, overthrows the altar, and establishes oratories in honor of St. Martin and St. John the Baptist. He preaches the truths of the Christian religion to the people of the district. (ch. 8.) He restores

to life a monk who had been crushed by the falling of a wall (ch. 11.)

536. According to some accounts this is the year in which St. Benedict sent St. Placidus to Sicily. (There is no mention of it in the Dialogues). He beholds in a vision the whole world brought together, as it were, in a single ray of the sun, and beholds the soul of St. Germanus, bishop of Capua, borne up into heaven by angels. (ch. 35)
539. He is miraculously supplied with flour for his monks. (ch. 21.) Miracle of the glass cruet and the increase of oil. (ch. 28 and 29.)
541. Martyrdom of St. Placidus in Sicily.
543. King Totila visits St. Benedict (ch. 15). From this date the chronology of St. Benedict's life is arranged,—On January 10, he sent St. Maurus to France. (not mentioned in the dialogues). On February 6, he had the last conference with his sister St. Scholastica (ch. 36.)—On February 10, he saw the soul of his sister St. Scholastica ascending into heaven under the form of a dove. (ib.)—On March 16, he orders his own tomb to be opened (ch. 37.)—On March 21, on Holy Saturday, at nine o'clock in the morning, standing in the

chapel of his monastery at Monte Cassino, and supported by his brethren, he receives the Viaticum and with uplifted hands expires before the altar, in prayer, in the sixty-third year of his life.—

(Note. The monastery of Monte Cassino, although laid waste by the Lombards towards the end of the 6th century, was restored by abbot Petronax and exists to the present day.)

PRAAYER

May the intercession of the Blessed Patriarch and Abbot BENEDICT render Thee, O Lord, merciful to us, that what our unworthiness cannot obtain, we may receive through his powerful patronage.

Raise up, O Lord, in Thy church the spirit with which our holy Father St. Benedict the abbot was animated; that, filled with the same, we may strive to love what he loved and to practice what he taught, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

PRAAYER TO ST. BENEDICT

O holy Father, blessed by God in grace and in name, who, whilst standing in prayer with thy hands raised up to heaven, didst most happily yield thy angelic spirit into the hands of thy Creator, and hast promised zealously to defend against all the snares of the enemy in the last struggle of death, those who shall daily remind

Thee of thy glorious departure and thy heavenly joys; protect me, I beseech thee, O glorious Father, this day and every day, by thy holy blessing, that I may be never separated from our blessed Lord Jesus and from the society of thyself and of all the blessed. Amen.

Appendix

The published lives of St. Benedict usually confine themselves to the contents of the II Book of Dialogues. There are, however, three references to St. Benedict in the third and fourth books, which ought not be overlooked.

The first is in chap. 16 of the III Bk. and reads as follows: A short time since, a very venerable man by name of Martin, was leading a hermit's life shut up in a narrow cavern on Mount Marsicus in the District of Campania. Many of our acquaintances knew him and were witnesses of his deeds. Much that I know of him, I heard from my predecessor Pope Pelagius (578-590) of blessed memory and from other conscientious men.

His first miracle was this, that as soon as he had betaken himself to the cavern in the aforesaid mountain, water began to drip from the rock. The quantity sufficed for the daily need of the servant of God Martin, so that he neither had superfluity nor did he suffer want... At first, before he had betaken himself to this place and begun to dwell in a cavern, he bound himself to the rock with an iron chain, one end of which was fastened to his foot, so that he could not move farther than the length of the iron chain permitted. When blessed Benedict heard of this, he sent a disciple to him to say: "If you are a servant of Jesus Christ be not bound by a chain of iron but by the bonds

of Christ." Hearing these words, Martin at once removed the chain, yet would not thereafter make a step beyond the spot in which he had been wont to move while he had been chained . . ."

In chap. 7 of the IV Book we read: I have already, in the second volume of this work, related that the venerable Benedict, as I learned from his devoted disciples, saw, although he was at the time far away from Capua, how the soul of Germanus, bishop of that city, was in the middle of the night borne heavenward in the shape of a fiery sphere by angels. When he beheld this soul ascending to Heaven, he also saw the universe gathered, as it were, in a single ray of the sun.

Chapter 8 of the IV Book relates how the monk Gregory saw the soul of his brother Speciosus leaving the body.

GREGORY. These very same disciples (of Benedict) have also related to me that two bodily brothers, men of some quality and skilled in secular matters, the one named Speciosus, the other Gregory, subjected themselves to his rule, and led a monastic life. The venerable abbot (Benedict) directed them to make their abode in the monastery which he had established at Terracina.* They had possessed much money while

(*As to the foundation of the monastery at Terracina the reader is referred to chapter 21 of the II Book of Dialogues above).

in the world, but had given up everything for the ransom of their souls and remained in that monastery. While the one of them, Speciosus, had been sent out to a place near Capua on business of the monastery, his brother Gregory, sitting at table with some of the brethren and partaking of food, moved by an inner impulse looked upward and beheld the soul of his brother Speciosus, who was far away, depart from his body. At once he informed his brethren, hastily made his way to the place where his brother had died, but upon his arrival was told that he had already been buried. Upon inquiring he learned that the death of Speciosus had occurred at the very moment of his vision.

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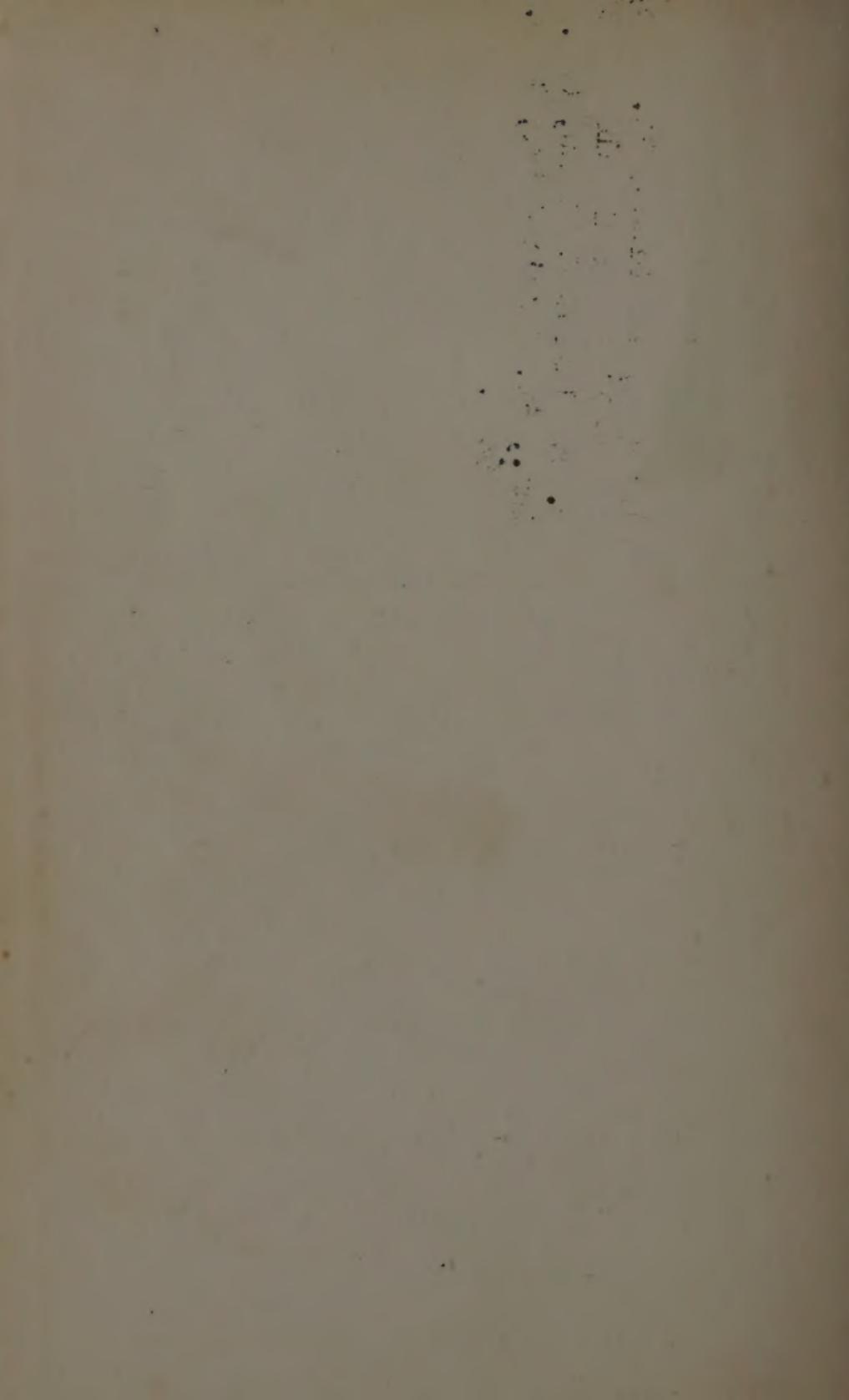
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